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## SUCCESSFUL PUBLIC-HOUSE REFORM.

BY THE RIGHT REV. FRANCIS JOHN JAYNE, D. D., BISHOP  
OF CHESTER.

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RIGHT reason and Scandinavian experience—these are the converging roads to belief in that method of public-house reform on which attention is now being earnestly and hopefully fixed in both America and Great Britain. Right reason, contemplating in other departments of life the achievements and adaptabilities of the civic spirit, the spirit of local patriotism, its power of conducting the business, supplying the wants, healing the wounds and grappling with the foes of society, is constrained to ask why scope should not be allowed for its beneficent operation here too, where “our need is the sorest,” and where, if anywhere, the best blood is required to purify and regenerate our social system. Why, at least as an experiment, should not the peculiarly perilous alcohol monopoly be transferred from private to public hands, placed beyond the reach of private greed, cut off from its sinister connection with party politics, and disciplined to serve the community of which it has hitherto been in no small degree the tempter and tyrant. By thus socializing the public-house, its character and motive would be transformed, and abuses attacked at the root.

This is the road which other feet besides my own have travelled. Two capital instances may be mentioned. The fathers of temperance reform in Sweden, who had no previous experience to guide them, were obviously led by sheer reason and common-sense to include in the act of 1855 that pregnant clause which bore the first of its now abundant and world-famed fruits at Gothenburg in 1865. Mr. Chamberlain has also kindly enabled me to state in his own words the working of his mind some twenty years ago. In a recent letter he writes :



"You are quite correct in supposing that my Scandinavian experience did not suggest my proposals, but that my visit was made to confirm previously formed ideas. I started with the idea that the evil we had to combat was not drink, but drunkenness, and that the latter could be better prevented by proper regulations of the traffic than by proposals of absolute abolition which were not likely to be adopted, or, if adopted, would be likely to be evaded. At the same time, I had just had experience of the extraordinary capacities of municipal government for dealing with most difficult questions, and had come to the conclusion that, wherever it was possible to do so, all trades in the nature of a monopoly ought to be conducted by representatives of the community, for the benefit of the community, and not solely with regard to private profit. You will see, therefore, that I am entirely in agreement with you as to the grounds on which the proposed reform should be advocated, and, while I consider that the experience of Sweden and Norway has amply justified the experiment, I should be equally disposed to try it even if the results in those countries had been unsatisfactory; for I should have attributed its failure, not to an inherently bad principle, but to unfortunate methods of application."

Later on, in the same letter, Mr. Chamberlain makes it clear that, though he still considers municipal licensing as ideally best, he readily accepts the so-called Gothenburg System, which intrusts the liquor monopoly to voluntary associations, working under control of the local and central authorities and in the full light of public supervision, as the line of least resistance and otherwise more suitable for pioneer purposes. Upon this point there seems to be substantial agreement among those who in different countries have studied the question. The Company System treads less heavily on the conscientious scruples of total abstiners, and more easily finds room for the co-operation of the many capable and trustworthy citizens who are ready for any good work, so long as it does not involve the ordeal of a contested election. How conveniently this system meets the case of total abstiners may be seen in the following extract from a letter which the President of the Swedish Temperance Society, Dr. Sigfrid Wieselgren, was good enough to write me not long ago.

"The by-laws of the Gothenburg Company do not prevent the election of non-shareholders into its board of directors. I was voted in, although I have never been owner of a single share, and during eleven years I was one of the directors. I beg to call attention to this feature of the company system as being *ad imitandum*. The companies are thus able to make temperance reformers members of their boards without being shareholders, which, no doubt, would be repugnant to most of them. But as members of the boards, they have an excellent opportunity of doing a great deal of good work. And such a coöperation would certainly exercise a favorable influence on both the companies and the temperance reformers."

Than Dr. Wieselgren no one can speak with higher authority on



this subject. "His lifelong interest in the question," we are told by Dr. Gould, "is known the world over, and his practical efforts contributed quite as much as anything else to the success of the existing system." As Director-General of Prisons in Sweden and member of the Upper Chamber of the Diet, he looks at the matter from more than one point of view, and his strong convictions in favor of the reform have just found fresh expression in his pamphlet *More About the Gothenburg System*, which exposes the errors into which their quite superficial and hardly unbiassed study of the question have betrayed two English writers, Mr. Whyte, of the United Kingdom Alliance, and Mr. Mortimer, of the Country Brewers' Society. In a letter dated January 18, 1894, Dr. Wieselgren contrasts "their miscellaneous items, their fallacious figures, the grouping of which is more than bold, and their evidence, which is generally so insufficient" with Dr. Gould's "minute and calmly searching inquiry," which he considers "worthy of our respect and confidence."

The second road is that of Scandinavian experience, which has amply verified and illustrated the conclusions of right reason. Thus the idea is found to be no Utopian dream. It has taken shape as a broad, strong, beneficent fact, full of vitality, and of steadily widening operation. That the Gothenburg system has succeeded may be shown by reference, first, to the opinions of nations expressed in the most practical and convincing way. Aristocratic Sweden gave the lead; democratic Norway, not always in accord with the sister-kingdom, has in this case enthusiastically followed suit; Finland has done likewise; and Dr. Gould calls attention to the significant fact that "*no single community, as far as has been learned, that has once tried the system has afterwards abandoned it.*" Switzerland, after careful inquiry, has brought the principle to bear upon the manufacture and wholesale trade in the higher classes of spirits, constituting this a federal monopoly, and official reports speak favorably of the results in the way of decreased consumption, sounder quality of liquor, and substantial profit to the exchequer. At the Alcohol Congress of 1890, M. Milliet, the representative of Switzerland, is reported to have said that "the Gothenburg System is the best yet known solution of the question involved." A share of the profits is distributed among the cantons, to be used in counteracting the



evil effects of alcoholism, and it is interesting to observe what a vigilant eye the federal authority keeps on the employment of this share. It will be noticed that in Switzerland the Gothenburg principle is mainly applied to the wholesale trade in spirits, and we are thus reminded that the system, fully worked out, would bring the production as well as the distribution of alcohol under control, the wholesale trade being undertaken by the central government, while the retail trade would be intrusted to local associations. The combined experience of Scandinavia and Switzerland may, perhaps, some day and somewhere result in this completeness of application. In the mean time, "Half a loaf is better than no bread"; and if the retail trade is well under control, the wholesale trade will effectively, though indirectly, be controlled also.

Turning to England, the most thorough inquiry was that made by a Committee of the House of Lords in 1879, resulting in the recommendation "that legislative facilities should be afforded for the local adoption of the Gothenburg and Mr. Chamberlain's schemes, or of some modification of them." But the serried ranks of the trade, curiously reinforced by a section of temperance reformers, succeeded in reducing this recommendation to a dead letter. None the less those who took the lead in 1879 are still among the staunchest advocates of the reform, while the evidence to which they can now appeal is far clearer and stronger than it could be in those early days. Nor was the movement altogether checked. In the canteens and regimental institutes of our army, especially in our Indian army, under the influence of Lord Roberts, and again in four favorably situated parishes under the most laudable enterprise of two clergymen and two laymen,\* what is essentially the Gothenburg System has been doing valuable service not only for those directly affected, but in support of a measure for which the country is steadily, if slowly, ripening.

From the opinions of nations we pass to the opinions of experts, and these, again, are practically unanimous in approval of the system. From America, Dr. Gould, Mr. John Graham Brooks, and Mr. Koren, Secretary of the Massachusetts Commission; from Sweden, Dr. Wieselgren; from Norway, Mr. Berner, sup-

\* Viz.: Lord Wantage, the Hon. C. L. Wood, the Revs. O. Albert Mordaunt, and F. Willett.



ported by 120 opinions of leading officials, collected last year by Mr. T. M. Wilson ; from Switzerland, M. Milliet ; from Germany, Dr. Baer ; for England, our late Ambassador at Stockholm, Sir F. R. Plunkett, whose two reports embody a multitude of contributory consular opinions, and the twenty-two Englishmen, including Mr. T. M. Wilson, of an average residence of sixteen and a half years in Norway, who memorialized Lord Rosebery in refutation of Mr. Michell's now thoroughly discredited report—here we have a bulk of testimony side by side with which the adverse opinions of Messrs. Whyte, Mortimer, and Michell look puny indeed. If space permitted, I could add a long list of those who have studied the system *in situ*, and are fully convinced that it ought to have a fair trial among ourselves. But apart from these, sum up the account, and it is no exaggeration to say that not less than ninety-five per cent. of the evidence is unequivocally favorable. Dr. Gould's conclusions, as given in his report, are doubtless so well known in America that I need not recapitulate them. In the fifth chapter he summarizes the advantages and disadvantages of the company system, and on examining these it is found that the few disadvantages do not belong to the system itself, but to the incompleteness with which it has hitherto been applied. Brandy drinking was the national habit and curse, to cope with which the Gothenburg System was originally framed. Of late years beer drinking has become an alarming source of drunkenness. The system is therefore being extended to meet the new conditions, and we learn that where powers have been taken for dealing with fermented as well as spirituous liquors, the results have been most satisfactory. One great lesson to be learned from Scandinavian experience is that control should be made as comprehensive and effective as possible, and the instrument is one which readily accommodates itself to altered circumstances and fresh requirements. In a letter dated January 10, 1894, Dr. Gould writes thus :

“ The deeper I study this problem and the more I acquaint myself with the different systems which have been at work in our American commonwealths, in Canada, and in other places where Prohibition, Local Option, High License, and No License have been tried, the more firmly I am convinced that the Scandinavian system of control is by far the best and most practicable method.”

Temperance reformers in England have lately been reading with much interest Mr. Fanshawe's careful and impartial report



on the American licensing systems. He leaves his readers to draw their own conclusions, but these can hardly tell in favor of prohibition, while high license comes off with more credit. Now it is surely true that in the Scandinavian system we have high license at its purest and best. An authorized company can offer the community advantages financial, social, and moral with which no one trading for private profit can hope to compete. The tender of such a company would run somewhat thus :

“ We are prepared to undertake the licensed victualling of your locality, paying to the dispossessed publicans and to other legitimate claimants such compensation as law and equity may require. We will at once reduce our houses to such a number as the licensing authority may deem necessary. In Stockholm the brandy shops were reduced from 193 to 87 in a single day, without a murmur from the working-classes. We will re-engage respectable publicans as managers on terms far more favorable to themselves, their families, and the community than managers now enjoy under the tied-house system. They will receive a fixed salary with a bonus on the sale of eatables and non-alcoholic drinkables, but with absolutely no benefit from the sale of intoxicants. They will thus have no inducement to push the sale of alcohol, to drink with their customers, or to adulterate their liquor, while temperance beverages of every kind will be brought well to the front, invested with prestige, and supplied in the most convenient, attractive, and inexpensive way. Our surplus profits, after payment of a strictly limited interest, will be applied to public non-rate-aided objects, chosen from within lines laid down by statute, and including the establishment of bright and attractive temperance houses, to which those who wish to keep quite clear of the temptations of alcohol in any shape can safely resort. We should start on the distinct understanding that, if in due time we are found wanting as public servants, we must promptly make way for our betters. This is our tender. Will you accept us as your servants?”

I have outlined the good which a company can undertake to do ; the evils it will prevent are thus summarized by Dr. Wieselgren: “The Gothenburg System has proved itself a protection *against* the evil influences of individual greed of gain ; *against* the continued impoverishment of poor public-house visitors through drinking on credit or pawn tickets ; *against* the public-house visits of young people, and their enticement to drink ; *against* the neglecting of the sanitary interests of the public-house customers with regard to the premises and the food which is sold there ; *against* the transgressing of the restrictive regulations of the law with regard to the hours of sale, the quantities allowed to be sold and the whole management of the business ; *against* a competition which lowers the prices ; *against* an unnecessarily great number of licenses being used, although granted ;



*against* the withholding of any part of the sale from taxation; and finally *against* the rise of a mighty class of private publicans who, wherever they exist, are the greatest hindrance to the success of moral or religious movements." It is hard to understand why a method of so much performance, as well as promise, should be refused a footing in any country which has the licensing problem to solve. But ignorance, prejudice, self-interest, and political complications are obstacles not to be removed in a day. Still *dabit Deus his quoque finem*, and the cause demands our staunchest efforts. Mr. Cobbett's famous saying, "The temperance cause lies at the foundation of all social and political reform" is as true now as it ever was. Our aims are not merely to reduce drunkenness with its attendant train of ills—pauperism, crime, and misery in many shapes—but, while strenuously securing this, to brighten, sweeten, and enrich the life of our people by lifting their public refreshment to an altogether higher level. In such a climate as ours, with labor shortening and leisure lengthening, this entertainment-of-the-people question must grow in significance and importance. To say, as we sometimes hear it smoothly said by brewers, publicans, their political dependents, and by the advocates of *Laissez faire*, that the true work of temperance reform cannot be done by legislation, but must devolve on religion and education, is to bewilder the public mind with the sophistry of a half-truth. Here, as elsewhere, it behooves us to clear our minds of cant. You cannot of course make men temperate by act of Parliament. But by act of Parliament you can do much to sweep away the hindrances which go far to thwart the best efforts of church and school. Those who talk so glibly of education should not forget, first, that the ubiquitous tippling-house is a consummate trainer of youth in the way it should *not* go, for vice can educate as well as virtue; and, next, that the demand for legislation is itself the outcome of those influences in which we are told to put our trust. It is just because religion and education have been fruitfully at work that the reason and conscience of a people cannot rest till law has removed the barriers shortsightedly set up by earlier law or lax administration, behind which drunkenness is protected and fostered, and till the good angels of society have thus been given a fairer field on which to do battle for the right.

The friends of temperance reform in Great Britain already owe much, and hope to owe more, to the corresponding move-



ment across the Atlantic. America has facilities denied to us, and, if I am not mistaken, is free from at least one difficulty which we must frankly face. We in England approach licensing reform with clouded eyes and fettered limbs. America can think and move more freely. The steps taken by the Washington Labor Department and the Legislature of Massachusetts—to say nothing of the great task which the National Committee of Fifty has undertaken—would provoke our envy, did they not rather claim our admiring gratitude and hopeful expectation. England's peculiar difficulty is that connected with compensation. About this I need only say that those with whom it is my privilege to act have a single eye to justice—justice to the trade and justice to the community. We press for a thorough and impartial inquiry into the grounds of compensation, that we may learn the facts and equities of the case, and so be enabled to do what is neither more nor less than right to all concerned. But the question is so fenced in by foregone conclusions, trade mysteries, and political entanglements that it is no easy matter to come to close quarters with it. As regards its financial aspect, those best acquainted with the working of the Scandinavian companies are confident that anything like reasonable compensation would be well within the means of English companies out of their surplus profits.

I have dwelt on our difficulties. I must not omit one special item of encouragement. Sir Wilfrid Lawson, the undaunted champion of public-house abolition, in a lately published letter, holds out the hand of goodwill to the advocates of public-house reform. To reinforce his counsel of toleration I may quote a passage from the appeal which in November last Dr. Wieselgren, himself a veteran temperance reformer, and a son of the Swedish "Apostle of Temperance," Dean Peter Wieselgren, addressed to those uncompromising prohibitionists who look askance on what they deem half-measures.

"When, on this way of moral and religious progress, we have reached so far that the majorities of the nations know 'the things which belong unto their peace,' then the licensing systems may be succeeded by the prohibition systems. But till then we must take care not to reject any help which from a noble motive is offered to us by our allies in the struggle against this great evil. Neglecting the use of a less effective remedy can not be excused by a declaration that we are not content unless the most effective one is offered. If our fathers had acted on this principle, if the policy of these modern temperance reformers who try to depreciate the value



of every reform which has not prohibition for its aim, had been followed by them, where should *we* have been? If any lesson is to be taken from the history of the liquor legislation of Sweden, it is that the object in view is more easily attained if it is perseveringly approached step by step than by standing still in vain attempts to bring about reforms which may be highly desirable, but are impracticable, even if this standpoint has been chosen on the top of some Nebo of enthusiasm, from which, at least in clear weather, the promised land of one's wishes appears by glimpses."

Perhaps the discipline of disappointment to which we have been so long subjected may weld into solid and well-tempered strength the detached and often mutually colliding sections of those who are of one heart, though not yet of one mind, in their zeal for temperance.

In the mean time a sound principle has nothing to lose, but everything to gain, by ventilation. Of stir and sifting and manifold enterprise on both sides of the Atlantic we can hardly have too much. To a better and more hopeful cause we may apply the old Jacobite motto, and cheerily say: "Push it about; it will come to the king."

F. J. CESTR.